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Johnson and Baretti. Some aspects of eigghteenth-century literary life in England and Italy. Lubbers-van der Brugge, Catharina Johanna Maria

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*While an author is yet living, we estimate
his powers by his worst performance, and
when he is dead, we rate them by the best.*
Johnson.

INTRODUCTION

In judging a literary product we may, if we like, confine our attention to the work as such, deliberately ignoring attendant circumstances. However, a knowledge of biographical details often proves very helpful in evaluating the worth of the author and may even be indispensable for arriving at proper conclusions about his work.

This is particularly true in the case of the writer I wish to discuss in this thesis: Joseph or, to give him his Italian name, Giuseppe Marcantonio Baretti (1719—1789), who spent one half of his life in Italy and the other in England, and who has long been represented as a rather bizarre figure, since these two phases of his life have never been properly correlated.

The question has arisen whether and to what extent Baretti can be said to have been influenced by the well-known English author, Samuel Johnson. As early as 1895 Vittorio Cian¹ hinted at the need for a careful investigation into the subject, since opinions regarding this influence were very much divided. Foscolo², for instance, had accredited Baretti with certain merits of his own but, as far as his criticism was concerned, had dubbed him "la scimmia del Dottore" (an ape of Johnson). Morandi³, on the other hand, had exalted Baretti's personal gifts. Luigi Piccioni⁴, writing in 1912, took a more balanced point of view. Arturo Graf⁵, with

¹ *Rassegna bibliografica della Letteratura Italiana*, 1895, pp. 7—12.

² *Prose Letterarie*, 1850, Vol. II, p. 236; p. 470.

³ *Voltaire contro Shakespeare, Baretti contro Voltaire*, 1882.

⁴ *Giuseppe Baretti, prima della Frusta*.

⁵ *Nuova Antologia*, 16 dic. 1911: "Sono in se stesse cosa di poco conto, ma come fanno già presentire e pregustare l'autore della Frusta. Il Baretti, giovane allora di 28 anni, non era ancora stato in Inghilterra e si vede che non era necessario (come da molti si crede) v'andasse per imparare quel

reference to an early work of Baretto's (*Lettere sul Dr. Biagio Schiavo da Este*) wrote that in his opinion Baretto had no need to go to England in order to learn the profession for which he had been destined by nature.

Various other authors have since written on Baretto, the most prominent being Natali¹ (who thought Baretto had failed to understand the age in which he lived), Benedetto Croce² (who attributed some value to him as a writer but none as a critic), Toffanin³ (who pointed out that, before Baretto, Becelli⁴ had advocated "a simple language"), and many others, such as F. Biondolillo⁵, Massimo Bontempelli⁶, Ferdinando Martini⁷ and Erminia Moroncini⁸. A closer inquiry, however, into the question whether Baretto had, or could have, borrowed ideas from Johnson was still lacking, until a thesis appeared, entitled *La Critica Letteraria nel '700: Giuseppe Baretto; i suoi rapporti con Voltaire, Johnson e Parini*, by Albertina Devalle (Milano, 1932), with an introduction by Vittorio Cian, the man who in 1895 had advised an inquiry into the relation between Baretto and Johnson. In this study one chapter is devoted to the problem that concerns us.

It stands to reason that the author could not go into the subject in great detail in a single chapter. In fact, she limited herself to a comparison of some of Johnson's works with those of Baretto, without a closer investigation into the circumstances of the latter's English publications prior to the *Frusta Letteraria* (Baretto's principal Italian work) or into the details of the lives of the two authors, who were intimate friends over a period of thirty years. Utilizing

mestiere per cui madre natura l'aveva fatto, sebbene non sia da negare che soggiornando poi in Inghilterra, egli leggendo quei polemisti e quei satirici si perfezionasse nel mestiere in quella che si veniva, come è naturale, anche perfezionando da sè."

¹ *Il Settecento*, 1929, Vol. II, pp. 138—147; also: *Idee, costumi, uomini, del settecento. Studi e Saggi Letterari*, 1926, pp. 255—260.

² *Problemi di Estetica e contributi alla storia dell'Estetica italiana*, 1910, pp. 443—448.

³ *L'eredità del Rinascimento in Arcadia*, 1923, Chapter XIV.

⁴ *Della novella Poesia*, Verona, 1732, pp. 161—163.

⁵ *L'estetica e la critica di Giuseppe Baretto in Poeti e Critici*, 1910.

⁶ *Il Baretto. La Frusta Letteraria*. Classici Italiani [1914], Prefazione, pp. 11—23.

⁷ *Le più belle pagine di Giuseppe Baretto*, 1921, Prefazione, pp. I—XI.

⁸ *Il Baretto artista*, 1921.

the material to which he was building on Arturo Onofri. Actually the same conclusion in sense borrowed from Johnson, impaired in consequence of this thesis not only reflects the quintessence of Johnson and Baretto entertained.

Since the appearance of this attempt has been made.

Later writers — such as Flora³, to mention one — deny that Johnson was susceptible of vanity. Can he claim that he has borrowed from another? None of the inconsistencies are the adventure-loving.

The only Italian writer of this quality is Mario Fubini. *Letteraria del Settecento* — la più originale opera di originalità si riduce allo studio del pensiero di Baretto that Baretto's ideas were already current at the time of his ideas on the last of being a pioneer.

¹ *Giuseppe Baretto*, 1940.

² *Preromanticismo*.

³ *Storia della Letteratura*, 966 seg.

⁴ Cf. Cesare Ariani in this book Piccioni (1942): "La critica letteraria delle quali l'Arici si vanta da alcuna intimità di ingegno."

⁵ *Dal Muratori*.

the material to which Piccioni had already drawn attention and building on Arturo Graf's investigations, Devalle came to practically the same conclusion as the latter, viz. that Baretto had in a sense borrowed from Johnson, but that his originality had not been impaired in consequence. We may, therefore, assume that this thesis not only reflected the author's personal view, but represented the quintessence of the opinions on the relation between Johnson and Baretto entertained at the time by Italian experts on the subject.

Since the appearance of Albertina Devalle's work no further attempt has been made in Italy to throw light on the question.

Later writers — G. Italo Lopriore¹, Walter Binni², Francesco Flora³, to mention only three of the most recent — by no means deny that Johnson had a "certain influence" on Baretto (a term susceptible of various interpretations), but ask what author can claim that he has been entirely free from the influence of any other? None of these writers questions Baretto's originality. If inconsistencies are met with they are ascribed to his tempestuous, adventure-loving character.⁴

The only Italian who has expressed doubts as to Baretto's originality is Mario Fubini⁵, who writes: "A chi studia la critica letteraria del Settecento, la figura del Baretto non si presenta come la più originale o la più complessa: direi anzi che la pretesa sua originalità si riduce a poca cosa mano a mano si approfondisce lo studio del pensiero critico dell' Europa settecentesca." Fubini shows that Baretto's ideas were not introduced by him into Italy but were already current among many of his Italian contemporaries. Even his ideas on the language (which had won for Baretto the reputation of being a pioneer of modern prose and a worthy forerunner of

¹ *Giuseppe Baretto nella sua Frusta in Studi Letterari* (Luigi Russo), 1940.

² *Preromanticismo Italiano*, 1948, p. 120.

³ *Storia della Letteratura Italiana*, Vol. II, Parte II, Cap. VII, p. 966 seg.

⁴ Cf. Cesare Arici, *L'Avventuriere della Critica*, 1926. With reference to this book Piccioni says in his *Bibliografia analitica di Giuseppe Baretto* (1942): "La critica del Baretto si svolse tutta come una serie di avventure delle quali l'Arici studia il valore e il significato. Quantunque non sorretto da alcuna intimità filosofica, il Baretto fu illuminato da un vivacissimo ingegno."

⁵ *Dal Muratori al Baretto*, 1946, p. 145.

Manzoni) had been expressed in similar terms by Becelli before him, a fact already mentioned, as we have seen, by Toffanin.

Fubini leaves unexplained the fact that Baretto showed little understanding of his compatriots and even fulminated against many of them who had the same aim in view as himself, for instance regarding language and style: the Verris who, like himself, had attacked the Crusca, Gravina, some of whose ideas on poetry coincided with Baretto's (compare his *Ragione Poetica*¹ with the latter's *Prefazione a tutte le opere di Corneille*), and Goldoni in his efforts to reform the theatre. Fubini also fails to account for the fact that Baretto's criticism was sometimes on a high level (though it can be shown that his knowledge was not in accordance with it), whereas at other times it verged on "nonsense" (as Lopriore calls it). The former is usually ascribed to his "buonsenso", whereas his lapses are put down to his "bizarre personality".

It seems to have occurred to none of these writers to inquire more closely into the years Baretto spent in England, in order to see whether this period might not provide material for a better understanding of the author of the *Frusta Letteraria*.

In England and America Johnsonian studies have led to a careful inquiry into the writers of Johnson's circle, Baretto among them. In 1937, five years, that is, after the appearance of Devalle's thesis, Allen T. Hazen published a book entitled: *Johnson's Prefaces and Dedications* (Yale University Press). This book contains the prefaces and dedications Johnson wrote for other authors, as well as his contributions of greater or lesser importance to the works of his friends, including Baretto's. Since Johnson was his main subject, Hazen limited his study, as far as Baretto was concerned, to the latter's English works. Hence we read:

¹ In this work Gravina protests against the limited understanding of those who based their aesthetics on the principles of Aristotle. He was not concerned whether the *Endimione* should be classified as a tragedy, a comedy or a tragi-comedy; what he considered important was whether the poem was a good one or not. Cf. Baretto in *Prefazione a Cornelio*: "Metastasio non ha soverchio badato a' precetti dell' Aristotile. Ma a che giova mai tutto ciò, se Metastasio piace e se ha fatto guadagnar tanti ducati agli stampatori che lo hanno stampato tante volte. Metastasio letto piace, piace cantato e piace recitato; ma quella de' ducati guadagnati dagli stampatori è la prova più grande per mio avviso del gran merito d'un autore, che aver si possa." — In the *Frusta Letteraria*, however, Baretto only fulminates against Gravina, with whom he here seems to be at one.

It is difficult to generalize about Joseph Baretto . . . I do not see the evidence of Baretto's bias in the book he published in England on Italian criticism (A. D. Johnson, *Life of Johnson*).

I have no difficulty in accepting her conclusions; but her treatment is too superficial to warrant any one intimately acquainted with Baretto, and especially with Johnson.

Conscious, therefore, of the limitations I have ventured to undertake, I have already been published. I have proved a one-sided case. The results of my investigations into the influence on Baretto of his far-reaching acquaintance with the character of the English language, its *auctor intellectualis*, his conversations with Johnson, and other writings, of his style, are less than of the rest. His *d'arte* were for a long time repeated and defended by his compatriots, morally and otherwise. The opinions of Johnson, the philosopher of his age, were never doubted. In many respects Johnsonian it can be shown — that Baretto also adopted his own character and style.

It is not the mere fact of another, or that he had that matters when determining the way in which this matter

¹ See D. C. Gallup, *Johnson in candidacy for the*

It is difficult to generalize satisfactorily about the literary career of Joseph Baretti . . . I do not doubt that Johnson gained much from Baretti; the evidence of Baretti's indebtedness to Johnson is continued in book after book he published in English¹ and it has recently been traced in Baretti's Italian criticism (A. Devalle, 1932. One chapter is devoted to the influence of Johnson).

I have no difficulty in concurring with many of Devalle's minor conclusions; but her treatment is too limited in scope and, moreover, too superficial to warrant the acceptance of her final conclusion by any one intimately acquainted with the personalities of Johnson and Baretti, and especially with the two authors' complete works.

Conscious, therefore, that a renewed inquiry is desirable, I have ventured to undertake this task, giving due consideration to what has already been published about Baretti, but rejecting what has proved a one-sided or partial representation of facts. In the course of my investigations it has become clear to me that Johnson's influence on Baretti was much greater than is usually believed, and had far-reaching consequences. It amounted, in fact, to his determining the character of the latter's work in England, to his being, in a way, its *auctor intellectualis*. It was on his English works and on conversations with Johnson that Baretti drew for the ideas of his other writings, of his principal Italian work *La Frusta Letteraria* no less than of the rest. Further, the opinions expressed in this *opera d'arte* were for a large part Johnson's ideas, which Baretti merely repeated and defended against the opposition of the majority of his compatriots, morally supported by the knowledge that they were the opinions of Johnson, whom he considered to be "the greatest philosopher of his age and perhaps of the coming ages too." He never doubted the correctness of Johnson's pronouncements. In many respects Johnson and Baretti were alike in character, but it can be shown — and this is a fact of prime importance — that Baretti also adopted ideas of Johnson's which ran counter to his own character and disposition.

It is not the mere fact that an author has been influenced by another, or that he has looked for inspiration to the works of others, that matters when determining his originality. What counts is the way in which this material has been used and assimilated. Upon

¹ See D. C. Gallup, *Giuseppe Baretti's work in England* (Dissertation in candidacy for the Ph. D. degree, Yale University, 1939.)

acquaintance with the various aspects of Baretti's works in relation to Johnson's, which I shall set forth in the following chapters, the reader may be able to decide for himself about Baretti's "originality".

Giuseppe Marcantonio (Joseph) Baretti belongs to both English and Italian literature, since he published works in both languages. During his lifetime he was reviled in Italy, but he achieved a measure of success in England. Nowadays he is as good as forgotten there, whereas in Italy his renown has increased of late. He is decidedly not a writer of the first rank, but is for that very reason a particularly interesting subject for study. Such a writer mirrors the ideas and trends of his period more clearly than do the great, whose strongly individual personalities overshadow the ideas of the age in which they live. General opinion on the literary value of such a writer varies according to the different aspects of his work emphasized from time to time, or by reason of the discovery of new information concerning him. This affords greater opportunity for an independent judgment.

As its title implies, the aim of this study is to throw more light on a certain aspect of Baretti, namely his relation to Samuel Johnson. However, in view of the facts which I shall bring forward, our conception of the man must differ from that generally accepted at the moment: and this may influence also our estimation of his contemporaries.

Baretti is an author with a limited field of vision. His various works deal repeatedly and always in the same manner with a few ideas only. These we find collected together in his two Italian publications written immediately after his first stay in England. It is in them that we shall best be able to trace Johnson's influence, although reference will also be made to his other works.

Baretti was restless by nature; he not only moved about from place to place in his own country, but after his thirtieth year began to wander from one country to another. For instance, we find him staying for various periods at Turin, Milan, Venice and Cuneo, visiting the first three cities several times. He spent more than half of his life in England and visited France, Spain, Portugal, Flanders and Holland. This, together with the encyclopædic character of his work, can hardly fail to be somewhat bewildering to the unin-

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tiated reader. For the sake of clarity, I shall, therefore, keep to a chronological order in dealing with my subject. In this way it will be possible to follow one straight course through the variety of events and the multiplicity of Baretto's opinions.

We may divide Baretto's life into two main parts: before and after his contact with Johnson, which took place about 1753.

Moreover, we can distinguish four periods in his life:

The first, from his birth in Turin in 1719 until his departure to London in January 1751.

The second, from 1751 to 1760, the period of his first sojourn in England, which may be subdivided: 1751—1753, and 1753—1760, the years during which he lived in close intimacy with Johnson.

The third, from 1760—1766, years spent in Italy, where he wrote a description of his travels in epistolary form: *Lettere ai tre fratelli*, and a critical literary periodical, *La Frusta Letteraria*.

The fourth or last period, in which he settled in England for good, from 1766 to his death in 1789.

The relevant material will be treated under the following chapter-headings:

Chapter I: Baretto's youth in the Italy of the first half of the 18th century, and the reasons for his departure to England in 1751.

Chapter II: Baretto's endeavours to earn a living in England. His contact with Johnson (1751—1753).

Chapter III: Baretto's contact with Johnson continued, including a discussion of more English works; with a summary of Allen T. Hazen's investigations into Johnson's contribution to Baretto's English works.

Chapter IV: Prolegomena to Chapter V:

a) A survey of Baretto's Italian works, written immediately after his stay in England, with a summary of Devalle's opinions on the relation between Johnson and Baretto.

b) An outline of Johnson's opinions as an expression of his personality.

Chapter V: Baretto's opinions examined in the light of the foregoing material.

Chapter VI: Parallel passages from Johnson and Baretto.

Chapter VII: A discussion of the Discours sur Shakespeare et sur Mr. de Voltaire. More of Baretti's borrowings from Johnson.

Conclusion.

A Summary in Italian.

Those who wish for detailed accounts of Joseph Baretti are referred to the biographies by Luigi Piccioni and Lacy Collison-Morley. Piccioni¹ has devoted more than half a century to an extensive study of Baretti's life and works, resulting in the publication of a biography and an almost complete edition of the original works, only parts and fragments of which were formerly available. Lacy Collison-Morley supplemented Piccioni's biography, as far as Baretti's years in England were concerned, in his book: *Giuseppe Baretti, an account of his literary friendships and feuds in Italy and England* (London, 1909).

For the benefit of those who desire a shorter account of this author — little known outside his native country — I have given a few biographical notes, based on the *Dictionary of National Biography* and the *Enciclopedia Italiana*, at the beginning of the first three chapters.

A complete list of Baretti's works will be found on p. 147 ff. Special attention is drawn to the following items:

1. *La Voix de la Discorde ou la Bataille des Violons* (Londres, 1753), written in French with the English text alongside, hitherto recorded as untraceable, but still extant. The Library of Congress at Washington and the Rare Book Room of Yale University Library both contain a copy of this work. I include a facsimile of the title-page; a microfilm of the whole book is in my possession.

2. *Remarks on the Italian language and writers from Mr. Joseph Baretti to an English gentleman at Turin, written in the year 1751.* London. Printed for Dan: Brown etc. MDCCLIII, which Piccioni excludes from the list of Baretti's works, but which is included by Lacy Collison-Morley. For reasons given in chapter II I have accepted its inclusion.

3. *Recueil nouveau des Pièces choisies des plus célèbres Auteurs François.* A Londres. Chez D. Wilson & T. Durham in the

¹ See Bibliography.

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Strand. Chez Davey Law. Ave Mary-Lane. MDCCLIX. A copy of this work is in the British Museum, and another in the Koninklijke Bibliotheek at The Hague. The latest catalogue of the British Museum includes it without further comment among Baretti's works, whereas in the previous edition of the catalogue the book was asterisked, to indicate that it was only *ascribed* to Baretti. As far as I have been able to ascertain, no further information has come to light to justify the unconditional ascription to Baretti, whose name is not mentioned anywhere in the book. However, this is also the case with the French works for the Italian Opera. Yet the choice of the fragments it contains, the place and year of publication (London, 1759), together with the French language, in which Baretti had published before, make it highly probable that it was indeed Baretti who compiled this book. Although neither Piccioni nor Lacy Collison-Morley even mentions it, I think that the British Museum catalogue is right in ascribing it to Baretti. See Appendix I.

4. A separate copy of the *Appendix to the Account of Italy, in answer to Samuel Sharp Esq. by Joseph Baretti. London. Printed for T. Davies in Russell Street, Covent Garden and L. Davies and C. Reymers in Holborn. MDCCLXVIII* (64 pages), which was included in the second edition of the *Account* (1769), is in the Rare Book Room of the Public Library of New York. This *Appendix* should, with the *Remarks*, have been included in Piccioni's *Pre-fazioni e Polemiche*, and is of great importance for a right understanding of the character of Aristarco Scannabue.

5. In the following pages particulars will be given about:
- a) An autograph presentation-note by Baretti in the book: *An Account of Zachariah Williams*, with Baretti's translation into Italian: *L'autore al Dottr. Francesco Zanotti Bologna*, in the left-hand corner of the title-page. (Rare Book Room, Public Library, New York.) (See p. 50.)
 - b) A holograph manuscript of: *Ortografia della Lingua Inglese* (3 pages) (Yale University, New Haven). (See photostat.)
 - c) An autograph letter to Mrs. Thrale, London, Sept. 26, 1774 (4 pages). Gift of Prof. Chauncey Brewster Tinker, Dec. 1945, (Yale University Library, New Haven). (See Appendix V and photostat.)
 - d) A copy of the *Carmen Seculare di Horatius Flaccus*. Very rare.

Issued solely for the performance on 12 March, 1779. With manuscript notes in ink, not by Baretti, (Huntington Library, Pasadena.)¹ (See pp. 51—52).

¹ The fact that many of Baretto's works (his *Dictionary* with the grammars, the *Introduction to the Italian Language*, the *Library*, etc.) are available in most of the libraries of the United States of America is somewhat puzzling at first and requires an explanation. Precisely at the end of the 18th century, we find an interest in foreign languages, including Italian, in the United States, which, on account of the wars, did not start any earlier. As in England, Italian was taught first of all by private teachers (in New York by August Vaughan, in Philadelphia by J. M. Kramer; about 1770 Mr. and Mrs. Cozzani had already a fairly large number of pupils). In the early years of the 19th century it was introduced to the Colleges. In the autumn of 1825 Columbia College began to offer Italian with Lorenzo da Ponte, the librettist of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, as teacher. In a letter dated Nov. 7th, 1824, Da Ponte wrote that he had sent fifteen grammars, as many dictionaries and some Italian books to Mr. Patten, Professor in Middleburg College, "where the Italian Language is very much studied." As Baretto's works were the most up-to-date and the most suitable for another English-speaking country, it is likely that it was Da Ponte who introduced Baretto into the United States, by sending his manuals to Middleburg College.

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